

Will Sex Keep You out of Heaven?

1 Corinthians 6:9-20 | Jonathan K. Dodson | August 31, 2014

Like last week, the moral stances in this passage, particularly on sexuality, can come off as regressive, out of step with the times. We live in a city that is progressive, pace setting for the times. But Paul doesn't want the church to be pushed and pulled by the times, old or new. Instead, he wants them to live in light of a fixed future, the kingdom of God. Paul is asking us to re-imagine ourselves as citizens of the kingdom and live like it. To do this, we need wisdom. How can we think deeply about the body, sex, and the kingdom of God *and live differently*? Paul says: 1) Heed a Kingdom Warning 2) Consider Cultural Responses (regressive or progressive) and 3) Embrace a View of the Body that enables you to radically re-imagine who you are *and* how to live as sexual creatures.

Kingdom Warning

Paul issues a stiff warning when he says: “[or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God](#)” (9). Because of our cultural climate, homosexuality leaps out in this list, and I'll address it a bit, later, but note that it is just one of ten habitual sins Paul mentions. So instead of jumping on homosexuality to condemn or promote, we should all pause to do a little inventory here. Which sin threatens you? For those of you in business/startups, *swindlers* refers to questionable business practices. Those that like to soak your worries with a few drinks, *drunkards* are given to too much wine. *Gossips, greedy*? Before we get too high and mighty to locate others in the list, look to find yourself, and chase away your sin. Do you know why this is so important? If you don't you won't inherit the kingdom of God. God doesn't issue empty threats, nor are his threats malicious. He speaks with integrity, stands on his character, and because he does, there is a moral order to the universe. What would happen if he didn't? There'd be no firm basis for what's right and wrong. It would be entirely subjective, defined by the most powerful, or left to personal choice. History shows us what happens when morality goes unchecked—war, racism, genocide, theft, oppression. But if God does stand on his character, there is moral universe derived from how he runs things in his kingdom? Then why are some Christians so bad? Well, perhaps they aren't true followers. God **insists that the people who bear his name also bear his character—that's the point—we are to live in line with the fixed future of the kingdom.** If we don't, the won't inherit the kingdom. We don't really like this idea. We think we should be free to live how we want and still get the inheritance. I was speaking with someone recently and their aging parents wanted to change their will. It was important to them that the wealth they left behind contribute to society. So they decided to remove one of their children from the will, reallocating their inheritance. The father knew his son would blow his hard-earned wealth, leaving very little good behind. So he cut him off. Why? Because the wayward son didn't live up to the family name. He dragged it through the mud. If it was your child what would you do? See, we know it's the fathers prerogative. But we act like spoiled brats, insisting we get the inheritance we don't even deserve it in the first place! Its not ours. We aren't entitled to it. The heavenly Father reserves the right to reallocate his inheritance, but

he'll only do it if we disown him, if we habitually refuse to live up to the family name. Now, does this relegate Christianity to works based religion?—work your way into the inheritance? Let's see, "[And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God](#)" (11). How do we get in? We get in just like any child gets into the will—on the family name, "in the name of the Lord Jesus." How do we get that name? We're born into it, doing nothing for it, bestowed. How are we born into God's family? By God's DNA getting into us. **We get in Him because his Spirit got into us.** We turn away from making our own name, and turn to the name above all names. It's grace, our right to the kingdom is bestowed. But it's not cheap. Don't squander it. If we drag the family name through the mud, if we disown the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, then we lose the inheritance. We show we weren't really part of the family after all. The word inheritance is filled with hope. It's frequently used in the OT to refer to Israel's promised inheritance of the land flowing with milk and honey. The NT comes along and fills out the inheritance to include not just Israel but the whole world (Rom 4:13), a new city, a place of endless human flourishing where the rivers run with wine, the city is marked by beauty and safety, to those who uphold the family name.

Cultural Spectrum

Now, the Corinthians *aren't* living in line with the kingdom. Instead, they've embraced a cultural wisdom on sexuality, which Paul interacts with in 12-20. This is all a bit confusing because he's quoting their sayings back to them, and then responding, and sometimes their sayings are in quotes and other times they aren't. But essentially, there's a spectrum of responses to sex. On the one end, they are saying sex is bad: "[It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman](#)" (7:1). Some translations say don't even touch a woman. This demonizes women. It demonizes sex. It deprives us of the joy God intended. Sex is meant to be fulfilling and bring good to society. This is the **restrictive view and its repressive**. Repress sexual desire, ignore it, hide it. Paul corrects the view saying, "Don't deprive one another," sex is good he says, *when it happens in line with the kingdom*. There's a moral order to sex, like there's a moral order to money in business, and alcohol in drinking. It's not inherently evil; it's good but like anything else it's made with a design, an order, in mind. That's one end of the spectrum, restrictive. The opposite end is **permissive**, "[All things are lawful for me](#)," (Paul counters) [but not all things are helpful](#). "[All things are lawful for me](#)," (Paul counters) [but I will not be dominated by anything](#). Essentially, the Corinthians are saying, "I'm free to do all things." No laws, no moral order except the one I create. Everything centers around me. This was a common Hellenistic view, the truly wise are free to do as they like, and it was probably rooted in a platonic idea that the physical body is inferior to the mind and the spirit. So they have this "Do what you want with the body" attitude because it doesn't really matter. "[Every sin is outside the body \(not inside\)](#)" (19). Sleep with whoever you want, a temple prostitute, have sex with men, women, kids. You make up the rules. Well there really are no rules. In fact, in Roman society temple prostitution was commonplace, and Roman men frequently would have sex with their female slaves and young boys, not only for pleasure but to show their dominance. Regardless of the fact they didn't think in terms of sexual orientation, their sexual ethic was still entirely based on a permissive morality, on personal freedom. Paul counters the liberal view by saying "[not all things are helpful](#), the word is *sunphero* and it has a little prefix on it

that means together. Not everything is good together, good for society, good for you.

Permissive can be destructive. And we know that sex, out of line with the kingdom, can be very destructive. Our culture knows this. Adultery rips apart a family. Pedophilia scars a child. But why? Why draw the lines here? If you're free to do all things, if morality is based on your freedom? Then why stop? Anthony Thistleton shows us why, "[But if we all have unlimited autonomy, no one can be free because everyone is threatened by the freedoms of another.](#)" In other words, if a person deems themselves free to sleep with your wife, then who are you to deny it? Unlimited personal freedom leads to moral chaos. If there is no moral order to the universe, then anything goes. Permissive is destructive. Restrictive is repressive.

Theology of the Body

So what's the solution? How do we avoid the repressive morality—sex is bad—and the permissive morality—sex with whomever, whenever? Paul gives several reasons, let's look at 2. **1st** v. 13 he says, "[The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.](#)" How do you determine the center for sex? By aligning it with the Lord, the body is *for* the Lord. Notice that he takes a step back from sex to the body because he knows that both the conservative and the liberal have a bad view of the body, total freedom or total restriction. And orient around their madeup morality, but the body and sex work best when oriented around God. **God has lordship over the body; the body should not have lordship over us.** We shouldn't be pushed around by our bodily desires and feelings. The Bible teaches that our moral order is out of whack because humanity fell from perfection—our beliefs, our morality, and even our *feelings* fell. That's why we can't always trust our feelings. They easily mislead us, and this includes sexual urges that are out of line with the kingdom, whether its adultery, premarital sex, same-sex, casual sex, or living together. When we follow those urges, we leave the safety of kingdom and are out in the open, vulnerable to being dominated *by the body*. **Our urges become our masters.** **2nd**, in v. 15, "[Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh."](#) What's he saying? He is saying that your individual body is a member or a part of Christ. It belongs to him; it's set apart, a temple he calls it. So what you do with it matters. When you bring the holy into the unholy, when you use it in a sexually disordered way, like with a prostitute, a sexual partner outside of marriage, you become one with her. When you do this, **something metaphysical happens.** One flesh. Sex changes things. Apparently there's a scene in *Say Anything* (no, I haven't seen it. It came out in a "restrictive" phase of my life. A cg friend pointed it out.) when the Lloyd sleeps with a girl, and his friend freaks out. Man, that's gonna change everything. Sex changes everything. You can't go back. The relationship is irrevocably different. It obligates us to provide for a woman, seek her spiritual, emotional, economic well being, not simply use her/him for sexual fulfillment. Casual sex cheapens what we are made for. Now why? **Sex is spiritual.** It unites us with another person in a way symbolic of our union with Christ. One flesh with one another is meant to show we're made for one spirit with God. Obligated to honor him in every way, financially, emotionally, sexually. Our physical union reflects our spiritual union; we're not meant for many partners; we're made for one partner. We're made for one

spouse just like we're meant for *one* God. See, our moral center for sex comes from God, from his very character, and he insists on us using it for our good. But we get so stuck in the past restrictive or present progressive, we can't imagine our sexuality in light of a fixed future. But if we did what Richard Hays says, ["If we could learn to think of our bodies as bodies with a future, we might be more careful about what we do with them now."](#) If we lined up our bodies, and sex, with the kingdom of God, more people would get to see the future in us. But even more profound, if we let our union with God settle in, we will act like we have the family name, and will receive a joy greater than sex, the inheritance of a new world flowing with milk and honey. If you're in Christ, then your body is a temple of God. It is dedicated to him, so glorify God in your body. Show him off by taking the gift of your sexuality and living in line with the kingdom.